

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

105th Congress
1st Session

Vote No. 171

July 11, 1997, 9:55 am
Page S-7233 Temp. Record

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION/Space-Based Laser

SUBJECT: National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1998 . . . S. 936. Bingaman modified amendment No. 799.

ACTION: AMENDMENT REJECTED, 43-56

SYNOPSIS: As reported, S. 936, the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1998, will authorize a total of \$268.2 billion in budget authority for national defense programs (the President requested \$265.6 billion). In real terms, this bill will authorize \$3.3 billion less than was provided in fiscal year (FY) 1997.

The Bingaman amendment would strike the \$118 million in the bill for a space technology demonstration launch for the Space-Based Laser Program. (The Space-Based Laser Program is a program to build an anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system capable of destroying ballistic missiles at any point in their trajectories, including at launch. The demonstration launch will not violate ABM Treaty obligations.) The Bingaman amendment would leave only \$28.8 million for continued research and development costs of the program.

Those favoring the amendment contended:

According to the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization, the United States does not face any immediate known threat that would justify the enormous cost of building and deploying a space-based laser defense system. No ballistic missiles are known to be aimed at the United States, and, by Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates, deploying 20 space-based lasers starting in the year 2006 would cost \$24.6 billion. Deploying an expensive system to shoot down non-existent missiles just does not make any sense. We are not necessarily against the development of any missile defenses. We recognize the need for some battlefield capabilities, but those capabilities should be ground-based and ABM Treaty-compliant. Since the 1980s, we have resisted efforts to spend enormous sums on the highly speculative idea of building space defense systems. To date, \$100 billion has been spent on "Star Wars," and the United States has nothing to show for it. That money could have been put to much better use meeting pressing human welfare needs. In this

(See other side)

YEAS (43)			NAYS (56)			NOT VOTING (1)	
Republicans (2 or 4%)	Democrats (41 or 93%)		Republicans (53 or 96%)	Democrats (3 or 7%)		Republicans (0)	Democrats (1)
Chafee	Akaka	Johnson	Abraham	Hutchinson	Dodd		Mikulski- ²
Jeffords	Baucus	Kennedy	Allard	Hutchison	Inouye		
	Biden	Kerrey	Ashcroft	Inhofe	Lieberman		
	Bingaman	Kerry	Bennett	Kempthorne			
	Boxer	Kohl	Bond	Kyl			
	Breaux	Landrieu	Brownback	Lott			
	Bryan	Lautenberg	Burns	Lugar			
	Bumpers	Leahy	Campbell	Mack			
	Byrd	Levin	Coats	McCain			
	Cleland	Moseley-Braun	Cochran	McConnell			
	Conrad	Moynihan	Collins	Murkowski			
	Daschle	Murray	Coverdell	Nickles			
	Dorgan	Reed	Craig	Roberts			
	Durbin	Reid	D'Amato	Roth			
	Feingold	Robb	DeWine	Santorum			
	Feinstein	Rockefeller	Domenici	Sessions			
	Ford	Sarbanes	Enzi	Shelby			
	Glenn	Torricelli	Faircloth	Smith, Bob			
	Graham	Wellstone	Frist	Smith, Gordon			
	Harkin	Wyden	Gorton	Snowe			
	Hollings		Gramm	Specter			
			Grams	Stevens			
			Grassley	Thomas			
			Gregg	Thompson			
			Hagel	Thurmond			
			Hatch	Warner			
			Helms				

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

- 1—Official Business
- 2—Necessarily Absent
- 3—Illness
- 4—Other

SYMBOLS:

- AY—Announced Yea
- AN—Announced Nay
- PY—Paired Yea
- PN—Paired Nay

bill, our colleagues have added \$118 million as the first step toward deploying a \$24.6 billion space-based laser system. Even if it somehow worked it would be a terrible waste of money, because, unlike in the 1980s, when there were thousands of ballistic missiles pointed at the United States, no threat exists today. We urge our colleagues not to embark on this new waste of money. We urge them to support the Bingaman amendment.

Those opposing the amendment contended:

Our colleagues have always opposed building a missile defense system capable of defending the United States. They have always believed that the better strategy is to rely on the threat of massive retaliation against any adversary that might attack the United States with ballistic nuclear, chemical, or biological missiles. Year after year, they have fought funding for missile defense systems, and they have managed to kill one program after another as they have neared deployment capabilities. The tens of billions of dollars spent have not been wasted, though. The research and development efforts have given the United States the information it needs to build an effective missile defense. The only thing needed now is the political will to give the American people the safety that they deserve.

Our colleagues are very impressed by the fact that at this moment the United States does not know definitively whether any ballistic missiles are pointed at it. Why this fact gives them such great comfort is difficult to fathom. Russia still is fairly unstable, and has thousands of nuclear missiles that the head of its nuclear forces has said could be aimed at the United States in a matter of minutes. Also, China will soon have ballistic missiles that will be able to reach the United States mainland, and numerous other unstable regimes are rapidly developing both weapons of mass destruction and the missiles to deliver them. At this second, the United States may not be targeted by any ballistic missiles, but there is no guarantee that 10, 20, or 30 years from now that missiles will not be aimed at, and even used against, the United States. In fact, it is very likely that it will soon face numerous new missiles threats, many of them from despotic, unstable regimes. Our colleagues assume that the threat of retaliation will be enough to deter some of the despots who will likely soon have ballistic missiles. Our colleagues are making a very dangerous assumption. Nuclear deterrence requires a rational adversary; it is not a strategy for dealing with terrorists.

The United States has several ongoing missile defense projects. Most of those projects are intended to develop battlefield defenses in the near future. We strongly support those efforts, and note that the Scud missile attacks by Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War clearly demonstrated that we need to build effective battlefield defenses as quickly as possible. Those projects, which are ground-based, intercept and destroy missiles in the middle and at the end of their trajectories.

However, just because we have battlefield defenses does not mean that we cannot or should not develop strategic defenses that could intercept and destroy missiles at any point in their trajectories. According to the Ballistic Missile Defense Office Independent Review Team, the United States already has the ability to build and deploy such a system. That system is being developed by the Space-Based Laser Program, which is making full use of all of the proven technologies that have emerged from years of testing various proposed missile defense systems. At very low risk of failure, and at the cost of only a few billion dollars per year out of a \$268 billion defense budget, a very effective missile defense system for the United States can be deployed. Missiles can be destroyed right as they are launched.

The program is at such an advanced stage that the next step that needs to be taken is a demonstration launch. This bill includes \$118 million for such a launch. The Bingaman amendment would cut that funding, leaving only \$28.8 million for continued research. Essentially, it would put the program into limbo for a year, thereby delaying the earliest possible deployment date. We see no reason for delay. We favor defending the American people against ballistic missiles, and this program holds the most promise of being able to provide that defense. The technology is mature; the likelihood of success is great. All we need is the political will. We urge Senators to demonstrate that they have that will by voting to defeat the Bingaman amendment.